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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [MEDIA](#) [REACTION](#)
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION HAMAS-ARGENTINA, IRAN-IAEA,
GLOBAL OUTRAGE OVER MUHAMMAD CARTOONS, CHAVEZ-U.S.;
BUENOS AIRES 02/03/06

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Main stories today refer to Hamas' declarations to a Brazilian daily announcing its trip to South American countries in search of political and financial support, with the FMA saying they haven't received any request for a visit or interviews; Argentina's possible vote on the Iran case today, siding with the U.S. and not with Cuba and Venezuela; Secretary Rumsfeld and Negroponte's tough declarations against Chavez, which seem to go in the opposite direction of A/S Shannon's more moderate expressions on the region's leftist trend to populism, and the global outrage over cartoons mocking Muhammad, which sparked criticism in the Muslim world and kindled a debate on the limits to freedom of expression.

2. OPINION PIECES AND KEY STORIES

- "Hamas, In Search of Argentine Back-up"

Center right, daily-of-record "La Nacion" says (02/03) "Hamas... plans to send envoys to Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia and Venezuela in search of financial and political support, according to Brazilian daily 'O Estado de Sao Paulo.'

"The movement's spokesman, Sami Abu Khuri, declared that Hamas wants to maintain contact with the Presidents of those countries 'to eliminate the idea that we're terrorists and show that the problem is Israel's occupation. We will make our position clear. Those countries need to support Palestine,' he said.

".... Brazilian Foreign Minister Amorim said yesterday that his country will only collaborate with Palestinian authorities if they recognize the State of Israel.

".... However, Amorim pointed out that the Brazilian administration hadn't received so far 'a formal request from Hamas to visit Brazil.'..."

- "Government House Denies Request for Visit or Interview"

Center-right, daily-of-record "La Nacion" says (02/03) "'Hamas is a political party and the GOA only has relations with the NPA.' The FMA official added 'We haven't received any request for an interview.'

"Yesterday's declarations by Hamas spokesman which appeared in a Brazilian daily sparked a wave of consultations.

".... The reaction of the Kirchner administration was similar to President Lula's, with whom he had recently tried to harmonize foreign policy positions. The main difference, however, is the way in which each country explained its position.

"While in Buenos Aires repeated requests of Government House spokespersons received no reply and the position of the local administration was summarized in a brief declaration from an MFA official, in Brasilia, Foreign Minister Amorim gave details of Brazil's position.

"MFA sources said they know nothing about any communication made by Hamas..., seeking financial and political support from Kirchner, Lula, Morales and Chavez, as declared by the Islamic organization's spokesman.

".... The Palestinian Ambassador to Argentina, Suhail Akel, said that, so far, he hasn't received official information on a possible visit by representatives of the fundamentalist organization to South American countries...."

- "Hamas: Possible Trip to Argentina and Brazil in Search of Money and Political Support"

Eleonora Gosman, centrist, leading "Clarín" Brazil-based correspondent, writes (02/03) ".... Hamas spokesman Khuri said it's most likely that Palestine's future Prime Minister Haniye will head the mission to

South America.

"According to Brazilian daily 'O Estado de São Paulo', the first one to report on the issue, Hamas' key interest is to seduce in those places where there are progressive administrations.

".... Hamas' tactic seems to be a high-level political operation in search of meetings with Presidents Lula, Kirchner and Chavez.

".... This diplomatic offensive is the result of a verified issue: several regional presidents, in their speeches, expressed their differences with the U.S. and even criticized the Bush administration.

".... Hamas seems to have understood that ruling is trying to find communication links with the rest of the world. According to Abu Kuhri, in addition to looking for political empathy, Hamas envoys traveling to South America will try to convince major public and private companies to invest in the Gaza Strip...."

- "IAEA Decision Today on Iran Case to UNSC"

Maria Laura Avignolo, centrist, leading "Clarín" Paris-based correspondent, says (02/03) "Iran bought more time - a month- in its efforts to downplay an international crisis of unpredictable results and avoid resuming its uranium enrichment program in the next few days. The IAEA, gathered in Vienna, offered a tactic truce until March, but the U.S. and the EU expect to obtain today a majority of votes against Tehran, in order to take the Iran case to the UNSC.

"IAEA chief, Baradei, said Iran 'isn't an imminent threat' and offered Tehran a 'diplomatic window of opportunity.'

".... The vote on the project of the P-5 to take the Iran case to the UNSC, will take place tonight.

"In the meantime, Moscow's negotiations with Iran to carry out its uranium enrichment program in Russia are still going on.

"But Tehran maintains its defiant position, and said yesterday it will ban IAEA surprise inspections after negotiations with the European troika failed and assured that China and Russia won't allow this offensive against the Islamic regime...."

- "Argentina, Closer to U.S. Position"

Florencia Carbone, center-right, daily-of-record "La Nacion" columnist on diplomatic issues, says (02/03) "Although so far nobody publicly risked saying how Argentina will vote, today our country will be closer to supporting U.S. position than aligning itself with Cuba or Venezuela in their rejection to send the Iran case to the UNSC.

"When asked about Argentina's vote, the Foreign Policy Director at the MFA, Luis Cappagli, said 'Argentina has a very clear position vis--vis the benefits of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, but is also strongly committed to nuclear non-proliferation.

"Some Argentine officials concede that the resolution 'isn't the one the country likes most.' Nevertheless, unlike Brazil, India and South Africa, Argentina hasn't presented amendments to the original text.

"Local officials would be happier with a resolution that allows developing countries that want to begin or continue their research of the peaceful use of nuclear energy, to do so. 'There's some reluctance among the most developed countries to shut down this possibility to smaller countries,' said someone who deals with these issues...."

- "U.S. Toughens Stance with Chavez: Rumsfeld Compares Him with Hitler"

Ana Baron, centrist, leading "Clarín" Washington-based

correspondent opines (02/03) "By comparing Chavez with Hitler, Secretary Rumsfeld clearly showed his game. Never before had an official of the Bush administration gone so far.

"'One has a Chavez in Venezuela, with an enormous amount of petrodollars. He's a person who was legally elected, like Hitler. Then he consolidated his power... Now, of course, he's working closely with Castro and Morales,' said Rumsfeld during a meeting at the National Press Club in Washington.

"Almost simultaneously, U.S. intelligence czar John Negroponte went even further on Rumsfeld's idea of Chavez. During a Senate hearing he accused Chavez of using democratic legislation to topple democratic institutions and of wanting to export his Bolivarian revolution to his neighbors via his 'petrodollar' diplomacy.

".... Rumsfeld and Negroponte's declarations seem to go in the opposite direction of Secretary Rice and A/S Shannon's policy aimed at seeking less public confrontation and more silent pressure.

"Yesterday, both Rumsfeld and Negroponte expressed their deep concern for the region, specifically because of what Senator Pat Roberts mentioned: the trend towards 'socialist and anti-U.S.' administrations.

".... Negroponte mentioned Brazil and Chile as two good examples of countries committed to democracy that are promoting economic growth, while trying to solve the issue of poverty. He also praised Colombia... for not abandoning the path to democracy.

"Negroponte didn't mention a single word about Argentina, which is, undoubtedly, good rather than bad news."

- "Relations"

Pablo Biffi, leading "Clarín" international columnist, opines (02/03) "Only 15 days ago, Tom Shannon... said 'the populist wave in the region' wasn't 'necessarily bad.' If this analysis were valid, we might suppose that Washington is seeking new ways to understand what goes on with its Southern neighbors. The chief of spies, Negroponte, and the Senate went back to zero when, using Cold War terms, he referred to the regional trend 'towards socialism.' Rumsfeld's declarations, instead, are violent words that help very little in stopping U.S. discredit in the region."

- "Debating Supreme Values"

Ricardo Kirschbaum, centrist, leading "Clarín" managing editor, opines (02/03) ".... The case has complicated aspects. There are direct threats against newspapers and an anti-European reaction, in sync with the blocking of Palestinian funds after Hamas' election victory.

".... The issue is the contradiction between freedom of expression, responsibility and religion. Intolerance is the worst solution to solve extreme tension in which coercion and threat replace dialogue and understanding."

- "The Responsibility of Respecting Man's Dignity"

Bartolome De Vedia, center-right, daily-of-record "La Nación" chief editorialist, writes (02/03) ".... Muhammad's cartoons... have deeply offended the conscience of millions of Muslims.

".... This is a signal we must pay careful attention to. Freedom of expression mustn't be exercised in ways that can offend the dear and beloved symbols that express or summarize the identity of a religion, regardless of the geographic or historic roots of the people that preach it.

"Of course, nobody must ask for mechanisms or censorship instances that may jeopardize the

extraordinary legacy of the XVIII century, which proclaimed freedom of expression as a supreme value of human societies. The simple issue is that this supreme gift to man not be exercised against the values which other men - or peoples - incorporated into their lives as the highest expression of their faith and culture.

".... Freedom of expression was born, historically, as the supreme expression of Man's dignity. It doesn't seem legitimate to use it to damage other men's dignity."

13. To see more Buenos Aires reporting, visit our classified website at:
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GUTIERREZ